



MEDIA RELEASE

Catalytic Converter Thieves Arrested

SANTA BARBARA, CA – December 9, 2012

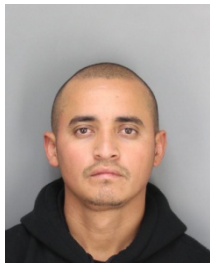
Thanks to an observant off-duty California Highway Patrol officer, a crew of catalytic converter thieves has been caught. Herbert Hernandez (age 30), Jesus Alberto Ortiz (age 20), and Angel Aguilera (age 29) were arrested for the felonies of conspiracy to commit grand theft, grand theft, and attempted grand theft and the misdemeanors of possession of burglary tools and vehicle tampering. The men are from Van Nuys, California.

On December 8, 2012, at approximately 2:47 a.m., an off-duty California Highway Patrol officer who lives in Santa Barbara's North End observed a suspicious occupied vehicle, a gold Toyota Corolla, on the street near his home. Concerned that the occupants of the vehicle might be involved in crime, the CHP officer called the Highway Patrol to send officers to check the area. Shortly thereafter two CHP officers in a marked vehicle responded and saw the suspect vehicle on the 4000 block of Otono Drive. When the officers arrived on-scene the suspect vehicle sped away, driving on the wrong side of the street and committing several other traffic violations. The officers were able to follow the suspect vehicle and ultimately stopped it on the 200 block of Lee Drive. The vehicle was driven by Hernandez with Ortiz and Aguilera as passengers. The CHP officers discovered that Hernandez was an unlicensed driver and saw that the trio appeared to be in possession of a variety of tools that could be used in the commission of burglaries, including two-way radios. Believing that the three might have been involved in a theft related crime when they were contacted, the CHP officers requested that Santa Barbara Police Department personnel assist with the investigation.

Sergeant Kenny Kushner, Officer Gary Gaston, Officer Charlie Venable, Officer Kyle Crooks, and Detective Rashun Drayton responded. A Toyota T-100 truck parked on the 4000 block of Otono Drive was located with its catalytic converter partially removed and a pipe cutter still attached. It appeared that the suspects were in the process of stealing this catalytic converter when they were interrupted by the CHP. The route the suspects travelled before being stopped was searched and several items that they apparently discarded as they drove away were recovered; including another catalytic converter, several bindles of methamphetamine, and tools. Detective Drayton interviewed the suspects at the Santa Barbara Police Department and Ortiz and Aguilera confessed that the trio went to Santa Barbara from Van Nuys for the purpose of stealing catalytic converters and selling them for profit.

Later, at 8:40 a.m., Officer Andy Freytag responded to the 400 block of Via Rosa on a report of a stolen catalytic converter. The victim there discovered that the catalytic converter from her Toyota 4-Runner had been stolen when she started her car that morning. After taking her car to a mechanic she was informed that replacing her catalytic converter would cost \$1400.00. Detective Drayton met the victim at Firestone at 3948 State Street where her car was raised on a lift and examined. Upon comparing the vehicle's exhaust system with the catalytic converter recovered from the early morning crime scene, it was apparent the catalytic converter had been stolen from this victim's car. The catalytic converter was returned to the victim and it was reinstalled in her vehicle by Firestone for \$20.00.

Hernandez, Ortiz, and Aguilera were booked at Santa Barbara County Jail on the aforementioned charges with a bail amount of \$20,000.00.



Hernandez, Herbert



Ortiz, Jesus Alberto



Aguilera, Angel

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